

**Education Agencies
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee of the Whole
Monday, March 28, 2022**

To: Committee of the Whole, Chairman Mendelson, Committee of the Whole members, and Committee of the Whole staff

From: Renee Davis, PAVE Ward 1 Citywide Board Member

Date: March 28, 2022

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Renee Davis-Marcel and I am a proud parent of two students with IEPs which are managed by the Capital City Public Charter School LEA in Ward 4. I serve on the Citywide Board with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE), representing Ward 1.

Today I'd like to testify on both importance of School Based Mental Health And Out of School Time funding for #AllLearners especially children with disabilities and or IEPs or placements due to FAPE outside the DCPS.

In DC, 15% of all students are children with disabilities – and about half attend public charter schools. My two children have had very drastically different experiences with accessing #SBMH and OST due to their neurological differences and subsequent different educational placements.

My daughter Alexa is autistic and attends a private high school in Maryland where she can work towards a DC high school diploma. On a typical day, she works with a home health aid before OSSE DC transportation school bus arrives and travels 30 to 45 minutes to her private placement. Before Covid-19 related shut downs, both of my children struggled with accessing School Based Mental Health, but for different reasons

Without a private placement for my daughter, I couldn't access any educational opportunities outside of a self contained classroom due to her Autism and the co-curing mental health issue – anxiety. My son attends - Capital City Public Charter School where School Based Mental Health is well funded in partnership with the Mary's Center. As a middle school student, since 6th grade he has been able to access these supports through his IEP mandated behavior support groups with their full time staff person at school with his peers. During COVID-19, last academic year, we used tele-health with the Mary's Center.

The Children's Guild has been providing all of her (IEP) related therapies via zoom. Now that in person learning is available, school based therapy is available in small groups with her Autistic peers in the highschool diploma track as well as with one to one support for career readiness. The latter track for students who don't anticipate getting a diploma but are still valuable allies for girls like Alexa as they struggle with communication and executive functions for daily living.

This type of robust support is not available at all DC schools or for all students with special needs who attend schools in the district. I am advocating today to ask the council to invest in \$300K to fund a cost study to determine the true cost of expanding the school-based behavioral health program now and in the future and to provide \$2.4M for stabilized grants to CBO providers like Mary's Center, who are the backbone of this program.

When it comes to OST, this year (2021 during virtual summer) my daughter Alexa participated in SYEP for the first time. Alexa is an Autistic 17 year old teen girl. And while each individual with ASD is different, all have some form of language or communication difficulties and experience challenges in social communication and social interaction.

Because of COVID, when her SYEP site opened virtual options, it was really great for us because it opened up the opportunity of employment to her for the first time. The benefit wasn't just the experience of working, but also the independence of earning money and having the confidence to live outside of the traditional notions of what children with disabilities can or cannot do. *With medical supports* Alexa also participates in Ward 1 based Girls Rock DC.

Access to high-quality OST programs, especially for special education students, provides so many benefits, but as we know, there are also so many added barriers to participation for the same group. And fixing that takes money and planning. I am grateful for the 15.3M in OST funding from Mayor Bowser, I want to see the District do an up to date needs assessment to ensure that the funding will be equitably distributed to meet the needs of Special Education students.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today!

Renee Davis
PAV Ward 1 Citywide PLE Board Member